



For Immediate Release

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***HATCH, ENZI, ISAKSON TROUBLED
BY FINDINGS OF CRANDALL CANYON PROBE***

Washington, D.C. – Top members of a Senate committee that oversees mine safety regulations reacted today to the findings of a Labor Department report on the Mine Safety and Health Administration's response to the Crandall Canyon Mine tragedy.

Sens. Mike Enzi (R-Wyo.), Orrin G. Hatch (R-Utah) and Johnny Isakson (R-Ga.), senior members of the Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP), say the report, which was released today by the department's Inspector General, raises some issues that the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) must address.

"Mining is a dangerous enterprise under the best of circumstances, which is why regulatory agencies must do all they can to prevent the worst from happening," Sen. Orrin Hatch said today, following the release of the report. "It is incumbent on MSHA to implement the Inspector General's recommendations outlined in the report."

"While not the final word on Crandall Canyon, this report is another piece of the puzzle that gives us a clearer picture of the tragedy and outlines some steps that MSHA can take to make mining safer," Hatch added. "Clearly, the report indicates MSHA must do a better job documenting how it approves, monitors and enforces roof-control plans. The process must be transparent as possible."

Sen. Enzi, ranking member of the HELP Committee, said: "I appreciate the efforts by the Inspector General to compile this report on MSHA's handling of the tragedy at Crandall Canyon. The IG has provided valuable recommendations to enhance mine safety planning across the country, and MSHA must fully and immediately address these recommendations to be more vigilant about the safety of our nation's miners. Roof-safety plans are essential to mine safety, and the IG's report raises a number of serious concerns about how MSHA reviews and approves these plans. MSHA must attend to these concerns and, where necessary, develop policies to ensure a thorough, rigorous and uniform process for the approval of roof-safety plans. Protecting the safety of miners must be our highest priority."

Sen. Isakson said: "The Office of Inspector General has presented us with a very detailed set of suggestions, which I urge the leadership of MSHA to consider thoroughly. The

report demonstrates that a top priority of MSHA should be to target its finite resources as effectively as possible. Clearly, there are a number of areas that must be addressed, including research into better technology, the acquisition of additional technical expertise and the development of better safety equipment. This, combined with a regulatory system based on performance standards, can better focus MSHA's efforts."

Documentation also was a key deficiency noted in the IG report. MSHA's District 9 officials lacked the documents to show if they carefully reviewed the roof-control plan for Crandall Canyon, followed proper procedures in approving the plan and were not unduly influenced by the mine's operator, according to the report. Documentation about implementing the plan and monitoring the condition of the mine was similarly lacking.

While the IG's report finds fault with MSHA, the senators noted, it does not pinpoint who or what is responsible for the August 2007 tragedy that ultimately claimed nine lives – six miners and three rescue workers. The senators said that is beyond the scope of this report.

For that reason, the senators said, now is not the time for partisan finger-pointing. A full determination of responsibility can't be made until other ongoing investigations are completed.

"We owe it to the courageous miners and rescue workers who perished, as well as to their families and to miners across the nation, to be as fair and thorough as we can in examining Crandall Canyon," the senators said. "The best way to honor them is to find out precisely how and why this tragedy happened and to do all we can to make sure it is not repeated."

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